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BY EMAIL:
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Dear Emily

RE: Planning Application 3/2024/0977 - Laneside Farm, Grindleton Road, West Bradford BB7 4QJ

I write in my capacity as Clerk to West Bradford Parish Council, and at the express request of members of the Parish Council.

The Parish Council has become aware of planning application 3/2024/0977, in which the applicant gives prior notification under Part 6 Class A of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015. By giving such prior notification, the applicant seeks to rely on permitted development provisions available for the erection of buildings **“which are reasonably necessary for the purposes of agriculture within that unit”** (my emphasis).

The applicant intends to erect a “multi-purpose agricultural building” of significant dimensions, measuring some “36.6m long, 20n [sic] wide, 7m high to eaves, 9.78m high to ridge”. Members note that the proposed structure is similar in dimensions and appearance to that set out in a previous application (3/2022/0737); this application was opposed by the Parish Council and subsequently withdrawn on 12 October 2022.

Many of the concerns expressed previously by the Parish Council in relation to application 3/2022/0737 are equally valid now. However, the Parish Council is keen to point out that it always considers each application on its merits, seeking to balance the need for any development (especially in an agricultural or employment context) against the residential amenity of the village. This is particularly so in instances of claimed “agricultural” status, where relief from business rates may accrue.

The Parish Council would now wish to submit the following observations:

1) Intended use of the building

Members note that the applicant clearly claims the use of the proposed building will be for agricultural purposes. This claim is reinforced by references made in the “additional information” form, which emphasise that the building will be used for “the storage of farm machinery, equipment, and other agricultural items”. Perhaps misleadingly, the form states that the “enterprise” consists of “10 approx dairy heifers”; 50 beef cows; 450 sheep; and 700 lambs.

However, as in 2022, members remain under the impression that the main business operating from the site is not of a traditional farming nature; whilst sheep are raised on the land surrounding the site, this activity is carried out by businesses separate to and independent of that of the applicant. It is believed that the applicant himself does not own or farm any sheep. In contrast, the applicant's business of Horner Shearing (which operates from the site on which the proposed building would be located) would appear to be run on a commercial and manufacturing basis. This is evidenced by the following information published online by the applicant:

“We only manufacture and sell the best shearing and clipping equipment and we sell it at affordable prices, all over the world.

We started selling sheep shearing equipment direct to farmers over 35 years ago, and now manufacture a wide range of products. We also supply spares for most machines as well as shearing clothing and accessories.

We are constantly improving and expanding our product ranges. Keep up to date and visit our website.”

This website can be viewed in full at the following address:

[Horner Shearing - Sheep Shearing Equipment](http://www.hornershearing.com)

If the applicant's business of Horner Shearing does indeed consist of the manufacture and repair of sheep shearing equipment (an industrial process), as well as the sale of such items (a commercial activity), then this could be considered as inconsistent with the claims submitted on the application form.

The Parish Council accepts that – from a technical Planning perspective – the definition of what is an “agricultural” use may extend beyond traditional farming and encompass ancillary activities such as the commercial manufacture and supply of sheep shearing products. However, in receiving the prior notification, members would ask that the Local Planning Authority (LPA) explores this issue further rather than accepting at face value the information provided by the applicant.

2) Size of the existing business

Members also have ongoing concerns with regard to the scale of the existing business operating from the site, which- although not situated within the Forest of Bowland National Landscape – is literally within yards of the National Landscape boundary and in a prime rural location.

The recent planning history of the site is set out below:

- 3/2020/0256 – this most recent consent relates to the building on the eastern side of Laneside Farm. The LPA determined that planning consent for the “multi purpose agricultural building” was not required. The delegated report arising from the application stated that the building was:

“reasonably necessary for the purposes of agriculture within that unit. The proposal is described by the agent as a multipurpose building for the storage of animal food and agricultural equipment / machinery. It will not be used to house animals.”

This building is 970.2 square metres in area and 8.5m in height;

- 3/2019/0534 – this consent relates to the erection of “One new building to provide farm office, workshop and store.” This is the office building situated at the Grindleton Rd end of the site; and
- 3/2017/0397 – this consent relates to the existing building on the western side of the site. The application related to a “Proposed extension to an existing agricultural machinery storage building.”

The area of this building is stated to be 663 square metres.

There are therefore 3 buildings already in situ, two of which are extremely large. Should the building featured in application 3/2024/0977 be erected, its internal floorspace will cover a further 732 square metres, bringing the total area to be covered by the 3 site buildings (excluding the office) to 2,365.2 square metres. Whilst members are always keen to support local businesses, and recognise the importance of providing appropriate employment opportunities within the parish, they would question whether the erection of yet another large unit would be in keeping with the local environment. Indeed, members have expressed concerns as to whether the current rate of site expansion could continue and, if so, how large could the site become?

Furthermore, members would suggest that the applicant has not always acted in good faith with regard to his planning history. For instance, members are aware that two of the onsite structures (one erected under planning consent 3/2017/0397 and the other seemed not to require consent under application 3/2020/0256) were erected as entirely separate buildings. They have however become physically joined together over time, potentially allowing for their joint utilisation in a manner for which no consent has been gained.

In summary, the Parish Council would ask the LPA to seriously consider whether prior notification should be accepted for a building which may be intended primarily for commercial use rather than being “reasonably necessary for the purposes of agriculture”. These concerns are compounded by the large and expanding scale of the commercial and industrial operations on the site, and the possibility that not all required approvals have been sought in the past.